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3 December 1974

Dear Harold:

I hope this finds you as healthy and happy as can be under the trying circumstances which your letters outline. Sometimes it's best just to say to hell with it and enjoy. . .but I know your commitments prevent much of that.

Frankly, I don't understand all the goings-on with Bud, Jim, Flammonde, Sobel, The Village Voice, and various and sundry people, places and things. But it seems clear that Mr. Fensterwald has a highly developed sense of self and an equally acute attention to his purse, both of which are working to your detriment. And as I told you on the telephone, I don't want to be portrayed as a man out to "do" Jimmy without regard for his rights and possible rights. Quite the contrary. I suppose I understand why Bud wants Ray to stay buttoned up, though I think that's a wrong decision. The Valentine interview and the Snyder spot--and were it come to pass, my piece--could only work to Jimmy's advantage. Whether we like it or not, most people in this country think Ray is a moronic monster who's better off rotting in jail, and let rights be hanged (maybe, eventually, along with him). Of course, that view is difficult to get in the pure oxygen environment of Washington and New York, but there it is. I should think any notice which dispelled that notion would be good for Jimmy.

That brings me to another substantial matter, that of possible Playboy interest in Ray's long-term judicial proceedings. Put as bluntly as possible, there is interest first in the Ray interview, second in an article or book on the whole affair (including new trial), and as a result of those, some interest in taking a larger role. However, that role awaits the first two, simply because--unlike us--most people don't really lose sleep over the King case, and so one must excite interest in it. Again, the interview would get things going so far as Chicago is concerned.

Now, Harold, in all confidence, I will tell you where I am and where I am going. I still think the best thing for all concerned, including Jimmy, is an interview which would cover his jail conditions, his responses to various public statements about the case and about himself, and so on. This would ignite further interest, as I've just said. But. . .if that fails, I believe I will go ahead with an article on the interview which didn't happen, among many other things, and let issues, personalities, and Ray's plight fall where they might. Please understand, though, that I am very sympathetic to Jimmy and to you and Jim, and so in no way would this piece destroy that manifest sympathy. Yet we must recognize the difference between an interview where Jimmy and we have our say, and an article which is per force opinionated. God knows, I much prefer the interview for that reason, but if Bud and all are set against it, I really have no choice.

This last, you can see, is the result of Playboy's fascination with the case. They want an interview. If that is denied, then we will go with what we have or can get. Ah. . .the combined glory and opportunism of publishing! But the point is, as I have told you often, that we are interested in the case, that I think that interest can be fanned, and that Bud's attitude while doubtless sincere and well-founded in legal considerations, works against Jimmy's interests, at least so we think.

Finally, Harold, I want to thank you very much for all the help you have given me through this. That's another reason the interview would be good, for then I could make recompense for that (something more difficult to rationalize in Chicago if the article alone is done)--no, I couldn't fully express my gratitude, but partially, anyway, and that's an opportunity I'd welcome.

I don't really know where this leaves us. I suppose in limbo. But if there is more word from Bud, or from Jimmy about his reaction to Bud's gag order, I'd be grateful to learn it. What I wish could be arranged is the interview, though if that seems impossible, so be it. Do let me know in either event, please, if it's convenient. Meanwhile, if there is something I can do for you without offending either your sense of the proprieties in this situation or your relationship with your colleagues in the case, likewise let me know.

Until word from you, my best wishes and regards for you and yours.

Sincerely,

Jim

P.S. The Star review of Whitewash IV is in the works. I'll have tear sheets sent you. Which reminds me, do you have clips of the Sun-Times and Voice stories? Anything there we can use?

P.P.S. Jim Lesar must now be exhausted after filing the papers. Give him my admiration and a hearty "good luck". Five gets you fifteen you get the new trial.